

Spunk

Title Page

SPUNK

By

Zora Hurston

Act I, Scene I

SPUNK

Act I

Scene I

Setting

All action from spectators viewpoint. A railroad track through the Florida woods. Luxuriant foliage on the back-drop. A hand car with tools is standing on the track at extreme left.

Action

The white boss of the extra gang is leaning on the car. The gang is "lining" a rail down stage, center. The singing-liner is moving about downstage, right. Dramatizes every utterance. Half dances every step. He chants and the men grunt rythmically as they pull on the lining bars.

SINGING LINER. Ah Mobile!

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MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, in Alabama!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah Fort Myers!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, in Florida!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, let's shake it!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, let's break it!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, let's shake it!

MEN. Hanh!

S.L. Ah, just a hair!

(Men straighten up from their strain, mop their faces and start for the hand-car.)

BOSS. Line another one before you spike. Come on, bullies!

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S.L. All right. Nine hundred pounds of steel in place! Let's go. (Men grab up bars and jump into place.) Come on if you're coming, let's go if you're going! (He struts to center and begins to sing.)

When I get in Illinois

I'm going to spread the news about the Florida boys Shove it over! Hey! Hey! Can It youline it?

Ah, shack-a-lack, a-lack, a-lack, a-lack, a-lack, a-hunh! Can't you move it?

Hey! Hey! Can't you try?

(The men grin and work furiously. He sings five verses and men join in chorus.)

(Peering down the rail to see if it is lined correctly)

BOSS./ All right, boys, that gets it. Hammers!

(The men all start towards the car with the bars to exchange them for snub-nosed hammers. Singing Liner is humming "This old hammer" and two or three others are harmonizing the hum. Off stage right can be heard the picking of a guitar and a baritone voice singing sketchily. All stop and look that way.)

NUNKIE. Who you reckon that is giving that box that nasty fit? If he can't play that guitar there ain't a hound dog in Georgia, and you know that's de puppy's range.

S.L. Wished I knowed myself. He sure is propaganda.

(Enter SPUNK walking energetically down the track. His hat is far back on his head. His shirt collar thrown wide open. He stops playing as he reaches the gang.)

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ORAL (in admiration) Hey, box-picking fool, where you come from?

SPUNK (pleased with the compliment) From Polk County, where the water taste like cherry wine.

(He plays a few bars of "Polk County". The men are in high glee. The boss frowns.)

BOSS. All right, boys, get to work. You killing up the Company's time.

BLUE TROUT (cajoling) Us going to work, Cap'n. Leave him play just a little

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bit, please. We could work twice as good then. (to SPUNK) Hit dat box, Big Boy.

(SPUNK starts to smile, then frowns. Advances threateningly on BLUE.)

SPUNK. Who you calling 'Big Boy'? You must be want to see your Jesus. Elephant is bigger than me, and they call him Elephant. I got a name.

ORAL. Tell a dumb man something! He know better than to be calling folks Big Boy. When these white folks say it you can excuse they ignorance 'cause they don't know no better. Blue just trying to be cute.

BLUE. Aw, y'all blowin' a mole hill into a rocky mountain! I didn't mean no harm. I beg your pardon, mister.

SPUNK (mollified) It's granted. Ain't nobody mad no more. (Crosses to BOSS) Say, Cap'n don't you need another man on this job?

BOSS. Yeah. I sure do. But I can't take you because I got all this breath-and-britches on the pay-roll. If some of them don't do better you can start to work Monday morning.

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NUNKIE. Cap'n your getting good service. Look what we done done since morning.

SPUNK. Anybody know where I can get a job of work 'round here? I ain't used to doing nothing. I got to work.

BOSS (thoughtfully) It's hard to tell exactly. Times is hard. You just follow the track into town - bout three miles, I reckon. It's a saw-mill there and they most always taking on men.

ORAL. They got a job right there now, but they can't get nobody to take it.

SPUNK. How come? They make pay-day, don't they?

ORAL. Yeah, good pay, too. But folks 'round here done got scared of that job.

SPUNK. What's the matter with it?

Act I, Scene II

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ORAL. Well, looks like everybody that takes it gets killed sooner or later.

SPUNK. What's it doing?

ORAL. Running the big circle saw at the saw-mill. Somehow or nother they gets killed.

SPUNK. I'll ride that saw 'til it's bow-legged. All I want them to do is to pay me. I'll ride it 'til it wear clean out. Boys, I'm gone like a turkey through the corn.

BOSS (impatiently) All right, boys! What you all trying to do - make me mad? Fool with me I'll have a brand new crew out here after pay-day.

S.L. Yassuh!

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(SPUNK hurries to exit left. S.L. pretending to sing for the boys chants after him)

Hey, you guitar picker, play it some more

Big toe party over town tonight, and I know you want to go!

Let's spike it, boys!

SPUNK (calls back over his shoulder) I heard you buddy! (his guitar and voice come back)

Oh I don't want no cold corn bread and mollasses

Oh I don't want no cold corn bread and mollasses

Gimme beans, lawd, lawd, gimme beans

I got a woman, she shake like jelly all over

I got a woman, she shake like jelly all over

Her hips so broad, Lawd, lawd, her hips so broad.

(curtain)

Scene II

Action

Group singing "All Ye Sins"

At the rise Mrs. Georgia Watson is presiding behind the refreshment

Act I Scene II

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mossy

trees

lake tree

boat curtain for foe sale

refreshments

L R

Footlights

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stand. ADMIRAL is beating out a rhythm on a soda crate and BLUE TROUT is trying to Buck and Wing. People stand around in easy poses, eating, talking or just looking on.

MRS. WATSON. Hey there, Blue! Did anybody hit you to start you? 'Cause if they did I'm going to hit you to stop you.

BLUE (attempting a fancy break and botching it) What's the matter with my dancing, Mrs. Watson?

MRS. WATSON. Don't ask me. I ain't never seen none of it. That what you doing ain't nothing. If you was dancing for peanuts you wouldn't even get the hulls. You ain't no trouble. Git out there Oral and do some sure enough dancing.

ORAL (sitting on the ground) Walt! I don't want to spread my 'til Maggie Mae git here. Then I'll dance up camp meeting, dust off' associations and strut Jordan dry. Hello!

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MRS. WATSON. She's liable not to pay you no mind when she come. All I can hear is the girls screaming over that new fellow that's working at the saw-mill. I can't hear nothing but Spunk.

TEAZIE. From what I heard he got some stuff for all you fellows round here. I wish he would come on so we could see if he's like they say.

ORAL. Oh, he's sort of over average built with oskobolic hair.

ADMIRAL. Let's squat that rabbit and jump another one. I'm a business man. Who wants to go for a boat-ride? I got my boat there. Only ten cents a ride.

MRS. WATSON (laughs) Now Admiral, you know ain't nobody here going to go out on the lake in that boat of yours. It's got so many cracks it looks like somebody worked it full of button-holes. Wese assembled for a toe party tonight. Not no swimming match. (general laughter)

ADMIRAL. It don't leak so much. Come one, come all! Ten cents a ride!

WILLIE JOE. Aw, shut up, Admiral, about your old beat up boat! Lemme tell

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you all what else that Spunk done today. Man, you aught to seen him! Soon as he got the hang of that saw he begin to talk to it just like a man would to his dice.

ORAL (gleefully) What he say to it?

WILLIE JOE. First he didn't say nothing. You know how a saw sound when it's cutting a log. A high moaning (imitates sound). Well, Spunk leaned his head down and listen to the saw 'til it got through. Then he answered the saw back in a king of singing way. Man,

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everybody stopped to listen, even the boss. And all the time he was really milling the lumber.

BLUE TROUT. Hurry up and tell us what he say.

WILLIE JOE. Oh, I can't remember exactly. Something about how that old saw had done chewed up a thousand million trees and spit out the dust, and had done chopped down men just like they was trees but it wouldn't never get him.

ORAL. Do it. Go head on, Willie Joe, and show us how he done it.

WILLIE JOE. Oh, I can't do it like him. Wait 'til he get here. He'll do it for you.

DAISY. Come on, Teazie! Let's me and you go find him and bring him on to the party.

BLUE TROUT. You all don't need to bother. Ruby Jones done grabbed him. He was eating his supper at her house just now. She done got him all sewed up.

DAISY. Aw, she ain't no trouble. That old beat-looking gal! All she can do is sing.

BLUE TROUT. Now here! Ruby ain't got nobody so it's all right for her to pull after the new man. But the rest of you girls belong to us. Better leave him along. Eh, boys?

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ORAL. Them girls know better. They just trying us out. Don't pay 'em no mind. Come on, Willie Joe. You go on and show us. Spunk and Ruby might not come a tall.

WILLIE JOE. All right, you all help me out some with the saw. You got to moan high like the saw while I'll talk like Spunk.

(He places Oral, Blue and Admiral together in a line and close together.)

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Now you all is the saw. Go head on and sound like one. (They get pitch and hum. He begins to chant.)

Oh, you done cut trees into lumber and -

(There is the sound of group talking off left and they all look that way.)

Here come Spunk and them now. Hey, Ruby, rush your frog to the frolic!

(Ruby enters proudly on Spunk's arm. Two other couples are with them. Spunk has his guitar slung across his back. Everyone looks at him with interest)

SPUNK. I heard you before I got here, but that ain't what I said.

WILLIE JOE. That's what I told 'em. I knowed I couldn't say what you said. They all wants to hear it.

SPUNK. 'Tain't nothing much to tell, but if you all so desire, I'll tell you and show you the best I can.

ORAL. We'se already the saw for you.

SPUNK. All right, let's go. Wait a minute. Do you know what the saw says?

ORAL. Now Do it say anything besides noise?

SPUNK. Yoah man. Before the log gets there the saw is grumbling to itself and saying 'I done cut a tree into a board, done cut a board into a box.' By that time the log is there. And the saw is glad so it can go to cutting. That's what it loves. Cutting. Filling up its jaws with trees. Spitting outsawdust and lumber. So when it hits the log it laughs like the horse in the valley of Jehoshophat. It says

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(boys begin hum of saw)

"I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own

I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own

I carry 'em down a smokey road

Bring 'em back on a cooling board

I'm going to make me a graveyard of my own."

So I listened good and answered it back:

"You done gaped your jaws

You done rolled your eyes

You done cut a coffin

But it ain't my size

You can growl and thunder

You can howl and sigh

But I'll wear you out, Lawd, before I die.

Cut your timber

Cut your ties

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Cut your timber, cut your ties

Show your teeth, Lawd, roll your eyes."

ORAL. Gee, youse powerful! Wisht I could be there to hear you talking to that old saw. It's done killed several round here.

(They crowd around Spunk for a moment. Ruby seizes his arm and stands there in ecstasy. Enter BLUE, MAGGIE MAE and two or three others)

WILLIE JOE. Blue, I know you ain't been by Maggie Mae's house and brought her. Oral say he ain't going to hear that.

BLUE. Naw, I ain't no trouble 'round there. We met up on the road. (to SPUNK) Hello, buddy! I see you got here.

SPUNK. Oh yearh, I always likes to be where the ladies and the music and the fun is. You ain't sold out all the toes is you? 'Cause

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I got money to buy some toes too.

BLUE: Nope, you know our people never hold nothing on time. They just coming now.

MRS. WATSON (beating on a skillet). All you young pullets and all you all hens go behind the curtain. We're going to sell off the toes. Everybody come on. Hurry up!

(There is a lot of bashful giggling as the girls haltingly make their way to the quilts. Ruby stands by Spunk without moving.)

Hey, Ruby, ain't you taking no part in the party? What you come here for?

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RUBY (coyly) I don't know whether my gentleman friend want me to play that or not. He might choose for me to just stay with him. (she looks coyly into his face.)

SPUNK. Oh, that's all right with me, baby. Don't let me stop your fun. The boys might think hard of me if they didn't get a chance at your toe.

(Ruby is chagrined and goes slowly to join the others behind the quilts. SPUNK pulls his guitar from behind him and plays a chord or two in an absent-minded way.)

MRS. WATSON. Whilst the girls is getting their toes ready to show, maybe our new friend will favor us with a guitar selection.

(Everyone begins to clap hands and SPUNK plays Polk County". His hearers are delighted.)

MRS. WATSON (in admiration) That's a box-picking fool! Gwan, play us some march music for the boys to march up and choose by.

SPUNK. I wants to march, too. I aims to buy a too myself.

MRS. WATSON. (arranging line) Get on the tail end of the line and play and march at the same time, like a nice boy. Don't make nobody beg you to play.

(SPUNK goes to the end of the line and begins to pick softly.

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The sale of toes begins. There is much laughter and shouting as the girls come from behind the curtain and the men see whom they have bought. Some are proud and strut up to the table, others hang back, WILLIE JOE pretends that he will jump in the lake to get away from his. SPUNK buys the last toe and find he has RUBY.)

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DAISY (sneering) I see how come newer put her toe out 'til the last!

RUBY (seizing SPUNK'S arm triumphantly) Young coon for running old coon for cunning!
Ha! Ha! Come on y'all lets play a ring play.

DAISY (gladly) I'm in the ring! (They begin to organize around DAISY. Enter at left JIM BISHOP and EVALINA and stand a moment looking about.)

ORAL. The very person we need to make this play go good. (calls out) Come on, Evalina! We fixing to play Baby Child!

(Evaline brightends and takes a step. JIM catches her elbow.)

JIM (turning towards refreshment stand) You better come on here and get this little treat while I'm in the notion of buying it!

EVALINA (pulling away slightly) I don't choose no treat yet awhile. I just got here. (she advances towards the game a step or two.)

JIM. Don't think you going to keep me up here half the night. I m a working man. By the time we walk 'round the place end see it all we going on back home. Come on here and get some sweeten water.

EVALINA (coldly) I ain't in no hurry atall and I done told you I don't want no lemonade yet awhile.

(She turns again towards the circle, and finds herself looking straight into SPUNK'S eyes.)

JIM (at the stand) Two glasses of that sweeten water Y'all call lemonade and make it good and cold.

(LINA hesitates a moment, undecided whether to follow her husband or to joint the ring)

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ORAL. Come on here, Lina! You can get a treat any old time. Quit acting ac scared.

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(She turns smiling towards the game. JIM drinks his lemonade and follows LINA with a glass for her.)

JIM. Here your treat, Lina. Here, take it before I spill it.

LINA. Spill it, then! Nobody don't care. I don't aim to drink nothing unless I want it.

(He catches her arm and tries to hold it to her lips. She pulls away.)

Don't you spill that mess on me and ruin up my good clothes.

JIM (tries to thrust it into her hands) Aw, here take this lemonade and drink it, Lina. You ain't going to make me waste up my money for nothing.

EVALINA. Nobody didn't ask you to buy it, did they? You always trying to put your mind in my head.

JIM. Fool with me I'll leave you here. Get home the best way you can.

EVALINA (over her shoulder) Go on then. Nobody don't care.

(Exit JIM, left, furiously)

WILLIE JOE. You better go on with him, Evalina. He going to tell his papa what you done done. He'll be working some more of his roots on you.

ORAL. Yeah, that's where he gone. He figger his old man can hit a straight lick with a crooked stick. Watch out. It won't be long before Old Hodge Bishop will be here.

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EVALINA. Let him go get his old pappy! I don't care. Come on, let's dance!

(She hurries to break into the circle. RUBY sees the look on SPUNK's face as he watches LINA.)

RUBY. Aw naw, this game is for young folks. This ain't for no old married women. They ought to go class off to theirselves.

(EVALINA draws back quickly with a hurt "oh" on her lips.)

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ORAL. Who you calling old? Evalina is a whole heap younger than you, Ruby.

RUBY. That's all right. She's married, ain't she? We're all courting couples. She ain't got no business in with us.

(She looks up at SPUNK in triumph. His eyes follow LINA.)

SPUNK. I don't believe I choose no ring play. Believe I'll just stroll around and look things over.

(He starts to break his hand clasp.)

RUBY (in panic) Aw, come on and play, Lina. Can't you take a joke? Meet my gentleman friend. Mrs. Lina Bishop, Mr. Spunk, (Rolls her eyes in admiration) Papa tree-top, tall.

LINA. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Spunk.

SPUNK. My compliments, Mrs. Lina. Hope to be better acquainted.

ORAL (jumping and clapping) Come on, let's go, people, (clapping gets hot. He begins to sing) Eh, yeh, Lollie Lou, Eh, yeh, Lollie Lou.

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(DAISY chooses ORAL and he chooses PALMETTO and she chooses Blue and Blue chooses another girl and she chooses AIMIRAL and he chooses EVALINA. The rhythm has grown terrific and ORAL begins to chant "Baby Chile". EVALINA dances it to a high pitch and chooses SPUNK and they end the dance in a frenzy of rhythm. Everyone is over-heated and tired. Some drop laughing on the grass. Others rush over for a cooling drink. SPUNK raises EVALINA from their final dance position and stands holding her hands. ORAL hands him his guitar.)

SPUNK. Miss Lina, would you do me the favor to step over to the refreshment stand and choose your withers on me?

LINA (coyly) Much obliged, Mr. Spunk, and my mouth is a little parched from all this dancing. I ll choose some lemonade.

(They stroll towards the table with RUBY and several others staring hard. While LINA drinks the lemonade he quietly buys her a huge stick of peppermint candy and places it in her hand. She accepts it gladly and they cross near the water.)

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SPUNK. Whilst we'se so hot from dancing, we ought to try one of them boat-rides. I loves to pull a boat.

LINA. Them boats is full of leaks. Admiral ain't fooling nobody on his boat-rides. (They laugh lightly.)

SPUNK (earnestly) Well, anyhow we can git in one of them and sit down, can't us?

LINA (nodding yes) Uh, huh, I reckon.

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(He helps her to a seat in the prow and seats himself on the rower s bench and picks up an oar. Everybody begins to stare silently.)

SPUNK. Must I shove off, Miss Lina?

LINA (nervously) We better not get out into deep water, Mister Spunk. It's dangerous, in the dark too.

(Enter HODGE BISHOP, left, An ominous silence falls as he looks all about him. He walks slowly to center and stands glaring at EVALINA AHD SPUNK. Then he lifts his hat, fumbles in the band and puts it on again, but backwards this time and exits again, left, insolently.)

SPUNK. Nothing can't be dangerous when you with me. I can swim real good. I could take the Mississippi river for a dusty road if I had to. I d love to be out on that lake.

LINA (looks about nervously) We better not, though. Not out on the water. Let's us just set in the boat.

SPUNK (seating her facing the audience and he facing her) Whatever you say, Miss Evalina. But I done found out it ain't no use being scared of things. If you feel to do a thing, do it. You can't die but one time nohow.

(She looks at him softly. He gets his box in position.) I got a song made up in me for you.

LINA. For me? You must have made it up awful quick. This the first time you ever seen me.

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SPUNK. It don't seem that way. Seem like I always been knowing you. When I seen you come walking in just now it seem like you had bean off somewhere and just got back home.

LINA. You don't seem strange to me neither. Look like I been knowing you, too. And that's a nice feeling. I don't like to feel strange 'round people. And that's the way I been.

SPUNK. I know how that is by my own self. That's how come I already got your song made up. But anyhow it ain't hard for me to make up songs. If I get to feeling real strong inside a song makes itself up and all I have to do is to sing it. Like this one I'm going to sing right now.

LINA. I'll be glad. Your compliments is nice.

HALIMUHFAK (song)

(He begins to sing and people listen amazed and then burst into a thudding monotone and pantomime of gossip as a comment on the situation. He sings two verses.)

LINA. Let's see! I can make up some to go with that.

(She sings a verse to him. The rumble and the gestures keep up. They sing the fourth verse together. While it is being sung HODGE BISHOP re-enters with JIM and glares ominously in the direction of SPUNK and LINA. As the song ends JIM struts over and stands glaring at her.)

JIM. Get yourself out of that boat, Lina! Anybody would think you was some courting girl, sitting up there! We going home.

(She alights with deliberation as the rumble rises to a thudding tempo. She haughtily strides across stage behind JIM to left. SPUNK rises too and walks slowly after her to center stage. As LINA reaches left exit she stops and gives SPUNK a long dragging look.

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He returns it in kind. Then she is gone. He continues to stare after her. RUBY creeps to him and hugs his left arm. He is impatient.)

RUBY. What's the matter, daddy? Look like you thunder-struck by lightning.

SPUNK. (Staring and straining like a dog on a leash to keep from following LINA) Aw, naw! I done got a letter from love and so help me I'll go to hell but what I answer it.

(CURTAIN)

Act II, Scene I

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ACT II

Scene I.

Action

At the rise there is the crack of mallet against ball and NUNKIE rushes across the court from upstage left to downstage right. His ball rests very near another. He stoops to arrange the balls.

DAISY (approaching him) What you doing, Nunkie? You never hit my ball.

NUNKIE (indignantly) Who never hit it? I almost sent it to Georgia.

ORAL. Aw, You never hit it. Stop cheating.

NUNKIE. I don't have to cheat you when I'm beating you. Talking about I didn't hit it! (He goes on preparing to roquet the balls.) I bet you I'll send it to Diddy-wah-Diddy.

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ORAL. That's all right, Daisy, let him roquet you. It's my next shot. I'm going to hit him and send him back to Ginny-gall, where they eat Cow-head, skin and all.

NUNKIE. I ain't from no Ginny-gall. Tain't no such a place nohow.

ORAL. Well, where is you from, then?

NUNKIE: I'm from Bandandy, Georiga.

ORAL (all laugh) You can gam, Nunkie, but don't bite. You know there ain't no such a place. Bandandy! Where is that?

NUNKIE. I don't recollect. I was too small when we left there for me to remember, but I done heard mama speak of many a time.

ORAL. That's a name your mama ma do up so she could claim you was born in a town. 'Tain't no Bandandy no where. Stop your cheating and let's play.

TEAZIE. Who cheating? You all the one trying to cheat us. I was looking right at you, Oral, shoving your ball into position at that last wicket.

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ORAL. Teazie, youse a - er, er, got-that-wrong! Girl, you can mold em. I ain't pushed my ball. Nothing of the kind. We going to beat you and have our correct amount of fun while we doing it. I mean to die bold.

MRS. WATSON. Aw, you-all hurry up and get through so somebody else can play. Me and Willie Joe going to take the winners.

RUBY. Now, let all of em come off when they finish that game. Let four brand new ones get on there. I'm tired of waiting.

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JIM (pulls coin from his pocket) Here, Admiral, run get me a cold coca cola.

ADMIRAL. Yessir. Don't you want me to bring you some cigarettes, too?

I need a smoke.

JIM. Well, all right. But I wasn't figgering on none right now.

(ADMIRAL darts off left running.)

DAISY (to NUNKIE, gloating) Now, you dead on the game and ain't even made your center wicket. You ain t no trouble.

NUNKIE. Aw, shoot and shut up! You have to play this game. Your talk don't help none. I done belled the buzzard, crowned the crow; got the key to the bushes and I'm bound to go.

MRS. WATSON (slams card down on table) High, low, jack and the bendwood tosser. Roasting ears ripe and the corn's et offa.

Gone from Two! out and gone!

WILLIE JOE. Gone out your head! Where you all get any two from?

(Re-enter ADMIRAL and hands JIM coca cola and change. He begins to open the cigarettes as JIM wipes the mouth of the bottle with his hand and places it to his lips.)

RUBY. Aw, let it go. Nobody don't care, nowhow. We ain't bet money. Let 'em have it.

(She looks about her absently and begins to hum.) Oh Lord, Oh Lord, let the words of my mouth, O Lord,

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(The others begin to pick it up)

Let the words of my mouth, meditations of my heart

Be accepted in they sight, O Lord

(They sing it the second time with full harmony)

MRS. WATSON. Ain't y all never going to get thru with that game?

(There is the sound of full guitar chords off stage. JIM starts violently, almost strangles himself and removes the bottle from his lips and listens painfully.)

WILLIE JOE. Spunk and Evalina all set for their afternoon stroll. Listen! He s coming down the steps when he play like that.

(RUBY drops her head upon the table.)

NUNKIE. Yep. Everyday, him and Evalina and the music going for a walk after work. Wonder how come they go walking every day.

ORAL. Why don't you ask him when he get here! Then you'll know. Betcha Spunk got a magnolia bloom in his hat!

ADMIRAL. Betcha he ain't!

ORAL. He is too! You ain't never seen them out walking less Lina had a magnolia stuck in his hat band.

ADMIRAL. I have.

ORAL. When was that?

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ADMIRAL. Yesterday. They was out walking and he didn't have no magnolia in his hat band.

ORAL. I don't believe it.

ADMIRAL. He done been out a lot of times without a magnolia bloom in his hat. (laughs) Man, don't you know magnolias ain't in bloom this time of the year? Ha! Ha! Lina's going to put some kind of a flower all over him every day. Magnolias is her preference, but she can't get 'em if they ain't on the tree.

(They laugh. Guitar heard approaching.)

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WILLIE JOE (winking broadly) Jim, how you and Evalina making out these days?

JIM (starts painfully) We'd be all right, I reckon, if we - if - if somebody didn't come between us.

NUNKIE. You ain't no kind of a man or nobody couldn't come between you. Some things ain't decent for a man to take. You low-rates your-self if you do. So what you going to do?

* (over) (insuch Nu page)

RUBY (jimping up suddenly with wet eyes) Why don't you-all leave him alone? You ain't got no gumption - teasing him 'bout a tiling like that. If a person can't get the one they love, it's pitiful! It ain't nothing to be cracking over. Leave Jim be!

WILLIE JOE. How come he's got to be different from everybody else 'round here? Y'all laughed and made all manner of jokes when Pearl left me and went down the East coast. Jim and all the rest of y'all cracked me hard. How come he can't take what he give?

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ORAL. That ain't the first time a man's wife been took away from him. Jim is just a fool to keep hanging after Lina when she's done told him she don't want him and gone to living with Spunk.

NUNKIE. Yeah, I had a good woman. (shrugs resignedly) The fool laid down and died.

JIM (stands with hands in pocket) Just like you say, Nunkie, I reckon it is my fault for being so easy. (strikes a belligerent pose) But Spunk done gone too far. I stopped by here today just in order to tackle 'em when they pass. I'm going to know from him today what he means by coming between me and Lina. I love that girl! I love her! If I don't love her, God's a gopher! (all but sobs)

WILLIE JOE That's right, Jim. Make him tell you something. Man ain't nothing but a man.

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WILLIE JOE. What's he going to do? Mildew! Do like the folks on the other side of the creek - do without!

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(There is a tinkle of music and EVALINA enters, left, clinging to SPUNK'S arm. He touches the guitar now and then. His broad-brimmed Stetson is full of honeysuckle. A bit hangs from his shirt pocket.)

SPUNK. Hellow, Oral! Hello Nunkie and Willie Joe! How you making it, Teazie?

ALL. Hi, there Spunk and Lina. Y'all sho' looks good to this world. Red hot!

MRS. WATSON. Say, Spunk, they all wants to know how come you and Lina go for a walk to the woods every day the Lord sends. How come that?

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SPUNK (laughing) Line, you know, is wild about her flowers, and she done made me make her a flower garden. So she always want to hear whatever new song I done made up setting out in the flower yard under the tree. But just as soon as I get to playing my song she begin to point out more work for me to be doing in the yard. So I just take her off into the woods where God done planted all the flowers she want and I don't have to work 'em.

(Everybody laughs)

WILLIE JOE. Women folks don't love to see a man sitting down. If you stay 'round the house they ll find plenty for you to do.

SPUNK. And ain't you noticed you can't never chop more stone wood than a woman needs? If you chop six pieces she'll get the meal. If you chop a hundred pieces she'll burn every last stick of it just the same. (laughter)

EVALINA (scolding tenderly) Now, honey, you know I don't burn wood like that.

SPUNK. Yes you do, cuteness. But if I didn't let you burn it the way you want to I'd be so mad with myself 'til I'd have to tote a pistol to bed to keep me from getting up and beating myself to

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death for worrying you. So I done made arrangements bout the whole thing. The boos is sending me a load of slabs every week from the saw-mill and I done got Admiral to keep plenty chopped up. Burn all the wood you want, baby. Youse all I'm working for.

JIM (swallowing convulsively) Spunk, I want to speak to you.

SPUNK (cool) Well, I m standing in front of you.

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JIM. Spunk, I done told Lina, and I done told her mama and now I'm telling you. I want you to leave my wife alone.

SPUNK. Who do you call your wife?

JIM. Lina, there. That's my wife.

SPUNK. That's a big old Georgia lie! You multiplied roach, you! She's mine!

JIM. How come she's yourn? I know you-all is living together like man and wife, but I got papers for her. I went to the big court house and got the papers and stood up in her mama's house and married her. Tell me that ain't my wife!

SPUNK (laughs shortly) Court house! Papers! Standing up on the floor! Humph! That do not make a woman yours. That don't mean nothing. Evalina is mine. God took and made her special for me. When I was a lad of a boy I seen her in a vision standing 'round the throne waiting for me and I been hunting for her ever since. You the one shoved yourself out of place when you went and got them papers. She's mine!

JIM (doggedly) Naw she ain't neither. She is so my wife.

SPUNK. She is not! All right, you say she's yours. A woman know who her boss is and she'll go when he call. There Lina is. You call her and see if she'll come to your command.

JIM (nervously) Lina, Evalins, why don't you come on back home and quit this living like you is? Got everybody in town talking about you like

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you was a dog. Come on home!

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LINA (impatiently) I m living home now. All the home I ever expect to have. Spunk ain't took me away from you. I went to him. And furthermore ain't nobody talking about me like a dog excepting you and your meddlesome old root-working papa! (draws away scornfully) Leave me be! I loose you.

SPUNK (involuntarily puts his arm about her) All right now, Jim. That s the word with the bark on it. Now as long as a mule go bareheaded don't you stop my wife on the streets no more and be nam-namming at her and trying to crumple her feathers. You talk your big talk to me. If you was a man my size I would have been done stopped you. I ignores men your size. If there's anything I hate worse'n no fight it is a poor fight. I hates to look imposing and bull-dozing. But you leave her be. I'm telling you. Let's go, doll-baby. Bye, everybody. See you later.

(They exit with the admiring glances of all following.)

ADMIRAL (looking after SPUNK) I hear you crowing, rooster! (to others) You have to give the man credit. He got grit in his craw.

(JIM stumbles back to his seat and sits with his head in his hands.)

RUBY. I don't give him no credit. Many single girls as it is round here he got to take a man's wife away from him. It's low-down!

NUNKIE (in mock sympathy) I know just how you feel, Ruby. Here you was all set to love Spunk yourself and Evalina took and taught him the amendment to love. It s tough! You gets just as hot as jail-house coffee everytime you see a 'em.

RUBY. I ain't got Spunk and his woman to study 'bout.

WILLIE JOE. Oh yes you is, Ruby. We all see you every afternoon all primped

up and sitting out on your steps waiting for Spunk to pass by. Oh yeah, you still love him.

RUBY. I don't neither.

WILLIE JOE. O yeah, you do. But why not take me, Ruby? I know I ain't nothing but you could use me 'til a real man come along. Lawd, that would be swell! Me coming home from work and find you singing all over the house with that pretty voice! Course you got that oskobolic hair, but I'd make it a habit to listen to you, baby. I wouldn't rest my love on looking at you.

RUBY. Your head looks like a pepper patch itself so you ain't got no cause to talk about nobody else. Looks like policement on a beat.

WILLIS JOE. All right, let's don't talk about hair, then. Let's talk about something else. How about love?

RUBY. Rock on down the road, Willie Joe. I don't want to talk about no love with you.

WILLIE JOE. What's the matter with me? Nobody didn't tell me but I heard that I'm a mighty sweet man to have around a house.

RUBY. Umph! I hope you ain't trying to call yourself a pimp! That face of yours would handcuff a devil-fish and he got eight arms. (laughter)

WILLIE JOE. Naw, indeed. I make a pay-day every week. And baby (exaggerated) I m crazy about you. You know it.)gesture of pretended affection) I'll do anything for you except work for you and give you my money. Anything else you just let papa know. I know I ain't no Spunk.

RUBY. (shoving him off) I ain't studying about you and Spunk neither. He ain t nothing.

BLUE TROUT. Oh yes, he is some good, too. He's plenty trouble. Most

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any man I know would be glad to be in his place. I know I don't fault him a tall.

ORAL. Yeah, Spunk s all right! Jim, thought your papa was such a good hoodoo man he could make a crooked road straight? That's what folks been saying 'round here. Your papa worked roots and made Lina marry you. How come he can't work 'em and keep Spunk from biting you in the back? Your papa must be losing his stroke.

MRS. WATSON. I don't believe he ever had none. He just been going 'round here fooling up anybody that would pay him any mind. Making out he know every chinch in China! I don't b'live a thing!

WILLIE JOE (fearfully) Well, I do. I done seen some might funny things happen. I know things can be done. Spunk better watch out.

ORAL. Maybe things can be done, but I don't b'lieve Old Man Bishop can do none of it. I useter believe, but since he done talked and prophesied all he was going to do to Spunk and ain't none of it come to pass, I don't b'lieve a thing. I don't even b'lieve that lard is greasy. Let's sing off of it according to common meter. I'm going to line it out. Y'all sing!

(Tune of "Get on board that ship of Zion, It has landed many a thousand")

Oh, Spunk ain't scared of Bishop's conjure

Oh, Spunk ain't scared of Bishop's conjure

Oh, Spunk ain't scared of Bishop's conjure

He ain't scared, Lawd, he ain't scared.

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(The others join in the spirit of fun. Full harmony.)

Oh he done made sweet Lina love him

Oh, he done made sweet Lina love him

Oh, he done made sweet Lina love him

Wish 'twas me, Lawd, wish' twas me.

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NUNKIE. Let me line out a verse, there. One done come to met:

He told the boss head a mess, Lawd

Told that boss's head a mess, Lawd (Oh sing it children)

Oh yes, he told his head a mess, Lawd

Ain't I glad, Lawd, ain't I glad.

MRS. WATSON (smiling) Ain't they crazy? (lauding) If you all ain't the biggest fools I ever seen!

WILLIE JOE. What made sweet Lina take and love him

What made sweet Lina take and love him

What made sweet Lina take and love him

Wish I knowed, Lawd, wish I knowed.

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JIM (jumps up jerkily) Whilst you all carrying on like a passle of fools, I'm going out in them woods and bring my wife back.

WILLIE JOE (rising seriously and catching Jim's arm) Jim, sit down. I wouldn't go out there if I was you.

JIM. Yea, I'm going and I'm going to bring Lina back with me, too. (Draws a razor from his hip-pocket and tests the edge) and Spunk better not fool with me neither. I done took and took until i'm sick and tired.

ORAL. Spunk got a gun. He always totes one.

JIM (twisting blade) Yes, and I got this razor, too. And I got a way to get him, and a firm determination. I'm going out there and he sho' God better not gripe me today (dashes off right) I'm out and gone! (all look behind him.)

MRS. WATSON. Why don't some of you men go catch that gump and bring him back?

NUNKIE. Mrs. Watson, you know that fool ain't going out there after Spunk sho' nough! There have to be some running before that

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fight come off. (laughs) Yes ma'am! Some darn good running before any fighting between them two. Jim's got a willing mind, but too light behind. He just bluffing us. He ll hide that razor behing the first palmetto bush he come to and sneak on back here and lie bout all he done. He ought to know that Spunk will kill him if he come drawing any razor on him or Lina.

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ORAL. Spunk wouldn't hurt him, I don't believe. I done seen him pass up the chance to fight two or three runts like Jim. If he push him, Spunk might cut a switch and whip his can for him, but he wouldn't knowck him around with his fist.

WILLIE JOE (gloomily) I don't know, now. Remember he ain t round the saw-mill. He's off with Evalina. A man don't take much when he's round women tolks that he prize. I wouldn't push him, if 'twas me. (pause) I wonder what make him think he can out-do Spunk?

ADMIRAL. Maybe he's peeping through his liquor. His whiskey told him to go fight and he's gone.

RUBY. Aw naw, he ain't drunk, neigher! You all drove him to that with your cutting capers and carrying one. You ain t got no sense, none of you.

MRS. WATSON (looking off left) Ain t that Jim's papa coming yonder?

RUBY. Yes, ma'am. It sure is. I'm glad, too.

(Enter HODGE BISHOP.)

BISHOP. Good evening everybody.

MRS. WATSON. I'm mighty glad you come along, Mr. Bishop. Jim is gone behind Spunk and Lina with a razor. Says he's going to fetch Lina and get Spunk. You ought to go stop him. Maybe he will listen to you.

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BISHOP (shortly) Naw, I wouldn't move out of my tracks to stop him from killing that Spunk. Jim s got my wisdom teeth in him. That s what he ought to have done six months ago. No jury in the world would convict a man for protecting his home. Let him kill the varmint. Loping up and down the road, taking off folkses wives.

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MRS. WATSON. Your wisdom teeth! Humph. Some folks is just like a possum - the older they get the less sense they got. If anybody got sense to see you won't pay no attention to that laugh of Spunk's. He's a man that gives 'em hard and stops 'em short. Youse better go call that son of yours.

NUNKIE. Why, you told me long time ago that you was protecting Jim's home with roots. It must not have worked cause Spunk got the girl, the best job 'round here and done gone to house-keeping. Your conjure must be getting all beat up. You ain't no trouble atall.

BISHOP. I got him set for still bait. I'm just waiting for a certain thing to come about, then I I make him gimme a back view. I'm slow walking him down.

(murmur of disbelief.)

ORAL. Sing it boys!

It may be so, but I'm 'bliged to doubt it

It may be so, but I'm 'bliged to doubt it

Oh it may be so, but I'm 'bliged to doubt it

Sounds like a lie, Lord, just like a lie.

(They pretend to shout, talk the unknown tongues and grow boisterous. Shouting "peace", "Thank you, father" and "It's truly wonderful". There is the report of a gun, and everyone stops still and listens for a moment. RUBY shudders and begins to sob quietly.)

WILLIE JOE. Gosh amighty! You reckon anything done come off? I feel

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like I'm running in my skin.

NUNKIE. Come on Oral and Admiral. Less we go see.

ADMIRAL (timidly) We don t have to run see do we? We'll get there quick enough walking.

(They start off right hesitantly. Before they can get off there is the sound of sobbing approaching. In a minute SPUNK enters with LINA sobbing beside him. Everybody stares and he stands there a moment before he speaks.)

SPUNK. Well, that creeping cat come out there and made me kill him. (He whirls and shows his back.) See where he cut my clothes? Yeah, instead of coming to my face if he wanted to fight and fight me like a man, naw, he got down on his hands and knees and crawled up behind in the log where we was setting and tried to cut me in the back. So before I could think, I wheeled and shot him, so he's dead. Somebody better go get him and bury him. I never meant to kill him, though. He made me do it.

(ORAL, NUNKIE and ADMIRAL bolt off right. HODGE BISHOP crouches and comes close to SPUNK from the rear.)

WILLIE JOE. Jim was just naturally death struck. I tried to get him not to go out there. Well, I reckon we better swear ourselves in, kind of deputize ourselves, and form a posse to place SPUNK under arrest and turn him over to the high Sheriff.

SPUNK (angrily) If anybody put their hands on me, just like God sent me a pistol I ll send him a man! That's the reason I always tried to stay out of trouble - so nobody wouldn't be tying me up like I was some cow! I'll go on over and tell the white folks what I done and how came I done it and everybody can come testify. But don't touch me.

(He puts his arms about LINA and they walk down stage, center. HODGE creeps after him threateningly.)

Lina, don't cry like that. I'm not gone for good. I ain't done no hanging crime. I'll be back sometime. Maybe not very long. And no matter what come, I'll be back. Even if they was to kill me, in twenty minutes after I was dead my spirit would be in the house with you. Go home, honey. You know where everything is. (Takes his guitar from 'round his neck and places it on hers.) You know next to you I love my box. Take good care of it and come see me as much as they let you. Oh God, I wish I didn't have to go! Go on home, now, before I move out my tracks.

(He kisses her and watches her exit, left. Then he glances around and sees HODGE gesturing behind him and wheels to defend himself. As he does so, HODGE retreats, snarling. As soon as SPUNK turns to walk off right, he rushes up behind him again.)

HODGE. Took my son's wife and then kill him like a dog! I curse you! I put bad mouth on you!

(SPUNK turns and glares and HODGE retreats in fear to a safe distance. As SPUNK turns, left, he rushes up behind him again.)

I point my dog-finger at you!

(SPUNK turns and he is so close that HODGE thought SPUNK had seized him. He almost falls in fright.)

I'm picking up your track! Ah (gloatingly) now I got you in the go-long. I put bad mouth on you!

(Each movement takes SPUNK closer to left exit, until finally he goes off with old HODGE following after with his right arm pointed menacingly. Stoops and takes sand out of SPUNK'S track and straightens up gloating and full of malice and hate.)

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You won't never get out of this! I done put my mark on you! The white folks will hang you! I got you now and I'm going to throw you away! I'm going to nail you up in a tree! You'll die!!

(CURTAIN)

Act II, Scene II

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Scene II

Action

At the rise about a dozen donvicts are working the highway in their stripes. The guard with a rifle in his arms walks slowly back and forth. The men are singing.

Please don't drive me because I'm blind

B'Lieve I can make it if I take my time

Lift up the hammer and let it fall down

It's a hard rocky bottom and it must be found.

CAPT. HAMMER. Can't you all find nothing to sing besides that damn mournful tune?

(All look from one to the other but say nothing, except SPUNK who is working near center. He pauses and rests on his shovel.)

SPUNK. I could sing plenty more If I had my guitar here with me. But I ain't. Left it with my wife. Didn't know what was liable to happen and I want it taken good care of.

CAPT. HAMMER. You reckon she'll do it?

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SPUNK. Why certainly! She'll do just what I say, no matter what it is. I'm sure glad I ain't got to be away from her but thirty more days. (Pauses a moment and thinks.) Cap'n is you got a cigarette you could gimme? I don't know how come Evalina didn't come bring me some yesterday. It was visiting day. She must be sick or something.

CAPT. HAMMER (pulls out a pack and hands it to SPUNK. Looks at other convicts and scowls) Hey, you bastards, get to work! What the hell you two doing whispering? Get away from one 'nother! (He fingers his rifle suggestively) He's a match, Spunk. I don't mind obliging you a tall. You been a good prisoner. Ain't

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gimme one mite of trouble the two months you been here.

SPUNK. (lighting cigarette and returning pack to guard) I ain't come here for no trouble. I wants to get through with this the quickest way possible and get back home. I ain't no conzempt! This the first time I ever been on a gang and I wouldn't be here now if that Jim hadn't of tried to kill me with a razor. (sadly) I just don't know how come Lina never come to see me yesterday. She know she can't see me but once a month and look like she wouldn't miss.

(Begins to work hard and hum. Then sings. Others join.)

OH LULU, OH GAL!

Got on the train didn't have no fare

But I rode some, I rode some

Got on the train, didn't have no fare

But I rode some, I rode some

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Got on the train, didn't have no fare

Conductor asked me what I'm doing there

But I rode some, I rode some.

(Men begin to get in happier mood.)

Well, he grabbed me by the hand and he led me to the door

But I rode some, I rode some

He grabbed me by the hand and he led me to the door

Hit me over the head with a forty-four

But I rode some, I rode some.

(Everybody begins to laugh, even the guard. SPUNK stops abruptly and stands brooding.)

Look like she could have sent me some kind of a word if she didn't come herself. (Begins to hum and sing again.)

All day long, you heard me moan, don't tell my cap'n which way I gone

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I'm going to loose this right hand shackle from round my leg

(Others join and harmonize)

Cap'n, cap'n can't you see, this work you got is killing of me I'm going loose this right hand shackle from 'round my leg.

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(SPUNK wipes his brow and laughs.)

Lord, Lord, Lord! Where'll I be thirty days from now?

Oh sitting up beside Evalina! Lord, Lord!

ANOTHER CONVICT. If some other man ain't done tee-rolled you with her. Ha! Ha! Maybe it's another mule kicking in your stall.

(SPUNK goes cloudy and his chest begins to swell slowly as he glares coldly and fixed until his chest has reached its limit.)

SPUNK. Now you done got me just as hot as the alligator when the pond went dry. You son of a conbunction! Evalina's name don't come in your conversation. When I call her name out here I'm talking to myself. Now you just crack one more time and you're going to woke a bad nigger out of me.

(He tenses his muscles ominously.)

CAP'N. Nixon! You leave Spunk be! Work more and talk less. (gently) Here, take another smoke, Spunk.

(SPUNK is fumbling a cigarette out while CAP'N holds the pack. Suddenly he thrusts the pack into SPUNK'S hand and starts walking left rapidly. SPUNK turns and sees WILLIE JOE walking thru' the gang staring at each prisoner as if he is searching for someone. CAP'N gets his rifle ready to fire as he crosses.)

Halt there! Hey, stray nigger, what you doing 'round here?

WILLIE JOE. (lifts both hands in the air trembling. He has a letter in one hand.) Ah just come here to bring Spunk a letter. Yessuh, somebody done sent me with it.

CAP'N. Why didn't you take it to camp and leave it? Fetch it here!

(WILLIE JOE advances) Know this nigger, Spunk?

SPUNK. Yessir, Cap'n. I know him well.

(His eyes burn with eagerness as he fixes them on the latter. CAP'N feels it for any concealed object and reaches it towards SPUNK.)

CAP'N. How the next time anybody send you with a letter, you take it where it belongs.

WILLIE JOE. Yessir, Cap'n. I sure will, (to SPUNK) I reckon I won't wait round for no answer. I'll tell 'em you can write later. (He hurries off left, looking back fearful of being shot.)

SPUNK. Cap'n, can I glance thru' it, please sir?

CAP'N. (starts to refuse, but softens a bit. Spits tobacco juice and nods his head yes) I reckon so, Spunk, since youse a trusty. (He glares at the others to maintain discipline.)

SPUNK (reads. Others sing a verse of song and work hard.) Cap'n, I got to go. This letter come to me and it's telling a lie, Cap'n. Hammer. I got to go.

CAP'N. Spunk is you gone crazy? You know you got 29 more days to make. You can't leave the camp, and you know damn well you can't. (Other convicts work in listening pose.)

SPUNK (as if he has not heard) Cap'n I got to go. (looks up at sun.) I'll be there by black dark. She say in the letter she done give me up. I got to go. (racks his tools beside the

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road.) Says she's never to be with me no more. I got a letter and it done told a lie. I got to no.

CAP'N. Spunk! Grab up them tools and git to work! I'll kill you!

(The others sensing trouble work furiously, looking fearfully over their shoulders at the guard.)

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SPUNK (Hitches up his pants and looks off, left.) I'd rather to be dead than to be like this. (turns left) You'll just have to kill me, Cap'n Hammer, cause I'm going. It's on the bill and it's got to be filled. I aim to go in the flesh, but if I don't make it I'll be there in the spirit. Bye, Cap'n.

(He starts striding heedless towards left. The others divide fearfully to let him pass.)

CAP'N' Halt there! I'll shoot you down! (softer) Spunk! You Spunk! I hate to kill you!

(SPUNK never looks back. The others fall down fearful of being hit by stray bullets. As he reaches exit the gun fires three times rapidly but SPUNK Strides off.)

Missed him, dammit to hell! He's got clean away!

(Turns fiercely upon the others.)

Get up off that ground you damn dog-meat, you! Grab them tools. I'll shoot you just to see you jump.

SPUNK (singing mournfully in the distance)

She used to rock me, rock me in the cradle by the window

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Rock me, rock me, Lord, rock me in the cradle by the window

Poor gal, don't do it now, poor gal (Hums mournfully)

She used to put them sweet magnolias in my hat band

She used to put them sweet magnolias in my jat band

Hibiscus, too, Lord, Lord, hibiscus, too.

I got a rainbow, wrapped and tied around my shoulder

I got a rainbow, wrapped and tied around my shoulder

It ain't going rain, Lord, Lord, it ain't going rain!

(mournful hum)

(CURTAIN)

Act II, Scene III

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Scene III

Setting: night time.

At extreme left is the front of Ruby's house with, practical door and steps. A wooden window stands wide open revealing an oilcloth covered table, a wood-burning cook-stove, Bright little fixings about the place. A china-berry tree at left of house. At extreme right is Evalina's house beneath a magnolia tree at left. A white picket fence. Window beneath the

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tree with low-hanging limb across the window. The wooden shutter stands open. A light inside. Street is downstage before both houses.

Action

At the rise, Ruby is puttering around between the stove and table. Evalina sits by her window with Spunk's guitar in her lap. She touches it now and then and sings. Ruby listens and hums an obligato above Evalina's on the chorus.

WHIP-POOR-WILL

Love come my way, stayed but a day

Went and left me crying like a child

It left me feeling sad, left me feeling bad

Maybe things will straighten after while

Chorus:

I'm going down the long lonesome road, Oh

I'm going down the long lonesome road

I'm going down that long, lonesome road.

(sobblingly)

Oh weep like a willow, mourn just like a dove

Weep like a willow, mourn just like a dove

Oh, fly to the mountain, light on the man I love.

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2. All my dreams is dead, things ain't like he said

I been leaning on a broken reed

He never meant to stay, just stopped by for a day

On his string of life I'm just a bead.

Chorus:

I'll see you when your troubles get like mine, oh

I'll see you when your troubles get like me

I'll see you when your heart is broke like mine.

(She sits there a moment touching the strings absent-mindedly. Enter SPUNK left and crosses rapidly. He steps over the fence and rushes to the window. LINA starts up.)

LINA. Spunk!! What you doing here?

SPUNK. (reaching thru' the window to touch her) A letter come. It had your writing on it and it said you was never to look for me back no more.

LINA (scared) Spunk, you done broke gang!

SPUNK. It ain't broke. I just left to see bout you. You done got religion like you say in the letter and done promised everybody to keep 'way from me?

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LINA (quietly) Yeah, Spunk. They done prayed with me and laid me under conviction of my sins. They showed me that my sins done got Jim killed and you on the gang. It's time for me to turn. I want to live clean.

SPUNK. I never felt no dirtiness being with you. I didn't know you felt what way 'bout me. So you done promised, huh?

LINA. Yeah, Spunk. They all done made me see.

(There is a long silence. SPUNK hangs his head.) You guitar is right here, Spunk. I took good care of it like you said. (she hands it to him and he takes it slowly) Hold up your

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head. You won't miss me long. Ain't that whay you say?

SPUNK. You doing the talking, Lina, I'm struck dumb. Guess I better jolt on down the road.

(He walks slowly out of the gate. She leans out of her window hungrily.)

LINA. Better come in and hide yourself from the white folks, Spunk.

SPUNK. Oh, let 'em get me! I'm guilty.

(He walks slowly towards left. RUBY steps out of the door and stands before him.)

RUBY. Hello, Spunk! Where you bound for?

SPUNK. Oh, just trucking on down the road. God knows.

RUBY (seizing his arm) You can't go way from here like that. Mama got shrimp with okra and tomatoes! Dry rice, too. You got to come eat some. Come on now, big doll-baby.

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(He lets himself be carried inside and sits by the stove and rears back in a chair gloomily.)

RUBY (standing before him) Take all them knots out your face. You got friends a-plenty. Where one door is closed, there's a thousand open, (calls loudly) Mama! Come look who's here! (to SPUNK) You big, old good-looking thing, you! Play me something on that box whilst I put the supper on the table.

SPUNK. I don't feel to play, (begins to tune) But I reckon I will a little. Songs make themselves up in you and then you have to sing 'em. They got to come outside. (strums) Never can tell what's going to come out. (strums) Sometimes they got light with a brightness, but sometimes they sad. You could wring tears out of 'em. (laughs bitterly) Maybe I been sleep-walking and just woke up.

RUBY. Sing, Spunk, but don't sing nothing sad. I hates blues!

SPUNK. How can I tell what I'm going to sing? We got the power to open

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our mouth, but God gives us our words.

RUBY. Play something you already know. Like that pretty song you played sitting in the boat at the toe-party that night.

SPUNK (shakes his head sadly) Wisht I could, Ruby. But I ain't the same man. To myself I looked like the king of the world that night. Now I'm round here looking like the figure of fun. I was in my element that night. A fish loves to swim in water, but he's dead when he's swimming in grease.

(Begins to improvise. Strikes a definite tune. LINA listens hard.)

GETHSEMANE

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RUBY. Play it, papa, play it! You got the business and you know it!

(She cuts a caper or two. He begins to sing. RUBY senses the song is not for her and gets quiet. LINA closes the window. Opens it again. Goes to the door and comes out doors and creeps to RUBY'S window. RUBY is sitting on the arm of the chair and puts her arm about SPUNK's shoulder. He sings. Finally she pats his cheek.)

LINA. Spunk!

(She yells his name and runs home and takes her same seat at the window. SPUNK jumps when he heard his name and looks all about him.)

SPUNK. Look like I heard Evelina call my name.

RUBY. What would she be calling you for? She done stood up in church and told everybody she was through with you. Say she aims to live free from all sin till she die.

SPUNK (crossing to door) So she figger it's a sin to be with me, huh? I didn't know that. (a short pause) Still, she called me.

RUBY (clings to his hand) Nobody ain't called you, Spunk. Maybe it's a ghost. You better not answer. If you do you'll die soon.

SPUNK (dragging RUBY as he goes) Lina called me. And if she didn't her

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spirit did. I got to go see. Loose me.

RUBY (still clinging) Aw, Spunk, stay here and get treated right. Somebody done told her you got a wife and child somewhere 'round Bartow and she b'lieves it. She don't want you

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no more. With anybody else I'd say the same thing myself, but with you I don't care. Don't go, Spunk. Hear?

SPUNK (standing in the door. Pushes RUBY off) I couldn't have been mistook. She called me.

(He leaps the fence and rushes to the window.)

What you want with me, Lina? You called me.

LINA. What make you think I called you, Spunk?

SPUNK. Cause I heard you. And if your mouth was too stiff to say my name, your spirit called me. I heard it.

LINA. Maybe it was your wife and children down in Bartow calling you home.

SPUNK. Who told you that lie, Lina?

LINA. It wasn't told to me, but I heard it.

SPUNK. I swear to God that's a lie, Lina. A great big old Georgia lie. What you reckon I come back for if it wasn't 'cause I love you?

LINA. Oh, some comes for a reason and some comes for a season.

SPUNK (shortly) The capacity of your vocabulary ain't nothing but saw-dust, Lina. Stop talking foolishness. I swear I love you.

LINA. Don't swear to a lie, Spunk. That makes everything even worser than it is already.

SPUNK. I ain't never told you a lie, Lina. Why you doubt my word now?

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LINA. First Old Man Bishop come told me that he met somebody from Bartow and they told him you had a family there you had done walked off and left. So I told him to get out of my face with his lies. Then somebody

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wrote me a letter with no name signed to it and told me the same thing. Then a man come hunting you. A strange man. Said he was right from there and come to take you home to your wife. He was asking everybody where you was so somebody pointed me out and he come here asking. Said you had a habit of going off like that to spend a while but you always come home whenever your wife sent for you. Said he had your railroad fare in his pocket. So then I told him where you was so he thanked me and left to go out there where you was. Didn't he come?

SPUNK. Je-sus! What a lie! Ain't no man been to see me'cepting these boys from here. That's some of Old Hodge Bishop's doings. He still trying to hurt me. So that why you quit me, honey? Lawd, lawd, it's just like the old folks say, 'You can't make buckling tongues meet.'

LINA. Yes. Ye see I worried and fretted a heap. I said I would just wait and see. Then the waiting got to be too tiresome for me. Waiting for you to come when maybe you'd be in Bartow done forgot all about me. It got to the place where I had done tasted all the food in the world. So I wasn't hungry no more. I didn't need no more sleep or nothing. I told myself it would be easier to quit waiting than it would be to wait for nothing. So I told 'em all I had done give youup. So they prayed over me and I joined the church Sunday and wrote you about it.

SPUNK. So the fight between me and them Bishops ain't over yet! And they all fights alike - underhand. He knowed that parting us would hurt me worse'n anything he could do, so

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he went to work and done it. I wished he had of killed me. Done experiences everything I hate to make my love come out right and love done throwed me down.

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LINA. Hurry up and tell me, Spunk, if you got that wife or not.

SPUNK. What you want to know that for? You don't want me no more.

LINA (bantering) Maybe I don't, but you see the waves a long time after the ship done passed. Maybe I want to know just for old time's sake.

SPUNK. What you trying to do - put thd hot-box to my head? You got me like a stepped-on worm. Half dead but still trying to crawl.

LINA. I done throwed up a highway in the wilderness for you to walk on. Answer me what I asked you.

SPUNK. I'll tell you with a parable, Lina. You know God got a long rail fence in heaven, made out of gold. And when he makes the people out of clay he stands 'em up against that fence to dry. And when they's good and dry, he blows the breath of life in 'em and turns 'em go. Lina, soon as God breathed on me I knowed I was lonesome and I knowed you was somewhere looking for me. So I come straight from God'd drying fence to you. I might have scumbled 'round examing a few girl babies to find out if it was you. But I am never even breathed marriage to no other woman in my life.

(LINA drops her head and sits silent)

I hope you did call me, Evalina. I needs calling. Ring the bells of mercy and call the sinner man home.

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(EVALINA leans out of the window and breaks a bloom from the magnolia tree and sticks it in his hat-band. Then draws back shyly.)

Move that chair out the way, Lina.

(She moves the chair. He steps thru' the window and closes it behind him. These is the baying of bloodhounds in the distance.)

(CURTAIN)

Act III, Scene I

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ACT III

Scene I

Setting: Croquet Court

Action

A same is in progress. It is late afternoon and all the young folks are out. Some playing, some sitting around. Enter Mrs. Watson, left, fanning with a palm leaf fan.

DAISY. I know you want to play, Mrs. Watson. You can take my hand.

MRS. WATSON. Naw, indeed! All I want to do is get off my feet. (Pulls off shoes as she sits.) My feet so sore from so much standing I don't feel like I can wear nothing on 'em bat a pillow-slip. The mess you all made at my house last night worked me nearly to death to get cleaned up. But wasn't that a reception, though? Old Spunk and Lina looked good on

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that floor! And when the preacher pronounced 'em man and wife I thought he would knock her down kissing her. (laughs)

DAISY. I know she was tickled to death to get him. But I can't see what she go and have a big wedding for and everybody know how it come about.

MRS. WATSON. That's their own business. If they want to brag off of they feelings let 'em do it. They ain't trying to hide nothing. At least they know what they getting married for and that's more'n a lot of other folks know.

DAISY. Wonder how come they didn't take him back to the chain gang to finish out his time?

WILLIE JOE. 'Cause his boss talked to the high sheriff over the 'phone and told the sheriff he need Spunk in the mill so he could meet his contract to some lumber. Sheriff come on over to the mill and him and Wilkins set in the office and drunk liquor and laughed and talked.

He wasn't arrested for killing Jim, nohow. That was self-defense.

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They give him them ninety days for toting a gun.

NUNKIE. He sure got off light. Kill a man, they give him ninety days and he don't even serve that out. He must be got roots.

MRS. WATSON. Aw naw! He didn't kill no white man, did/he? The white folks don't care nothing 'bout one nigger killing another one. And then again Spunk is a good worker and Jim was lazy. So they figger they don't even miss him. (big laugh)

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NUNKIE. Yeah, they 'bout figger that Spunk saved them the trouble of killing him themselves.)more laughter)

WILLIE JOE. Yeah man, the boss called Spunk into the office to talk with the Sheriff. Know what he say? Says 'Well, Spunk, the country is running short of groceries so you'll have to get off the gang and go to working for yourself.' Then he laughed, one of them big blow-out laughs, and told Spunk not to give the boss no trouble.

ORAL* And to tell you the truth, white folks don't care nothing 'bout our moral doings. If you work good and don't give 'em no trouble you'se a good nigger and they like you. Otherwise they don't give a damn. And you all know that the God's truth. Son don't heat up your gums and lie. (laughter) Naturally his old man feels bad 'bout Jim.

WILLIE JOE. Naturally. (looks at his watch) Spunk and Lina is late today for their stroll.

MRS. WATSON. Late? They don't just have to get here no special time, do they? What you rushing 'em for? They looks just the same as ever.

WILLIE JOE. Oh, I just want to see and hear what new song he made up for today, being he makes a new one nearly every day. (to ADMIRAL) Let's set up a good game of croquet. Me and Nunkie will play you and Oral.

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Let's go.

(All rise. There is a havey chord on the box and Spunk and LINA enter. She carries a guitar made out of a cigar box. Both are beaming.)

Hey Spunk! What you say? What you say? What is it today?

SPUNK (beaming) It's about the family this time. Me and Evalina and our baby boy.

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MRS. WATSON. Where you all get any baby boy from? I ain't seen none.

SPUNK. Us got married last night, didn't we? It won't be long now. I done gone to fixing for him.

ORAL. What's that you got in your hand, Lina?

LINA (laughing) That's the baby's guitar.

ORAL. The baby's guitar!

SPUNK. Yeah, man. I made it at the mill today. I'm not going to let my son sit up in the cradle and ask his daddy 'Papa, how you let me come in this world without no instrument to play on?' So I done made it already. Man, by the time he's ten years old I'll be be shame to play in front of him. And what make it so cool, he's going to look just like me.

MRS. WATSON. How you know that, Spunk? It's liable to take after Lina or some of her folks or some of yours. You never can tell.

SPUNK. Oh no! My first baby got to favor me. She can mold some of the others to favor our kinfolks, but that first one got to be the very spit of me.

(plays and sings "EVALINA." All joining in chORUS.)

SPUNK. Yeah man, that boy of mine is going to be a whip!

LINA (seriously) If nobody don't do nothing to him.

SPUNK. Nobody better not do nothing to our son and stay on this earth. I'll run 'em as slick as a meat-skin.

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LINA. They might not come out bold. Some folks takes undercurrents. Throw at you and hide they hand.

SPUNK. You talking about old man Bishop? I done told you ain't nothing to him.

LINA (generally) You know Spank don't believe in nothing. He don't b'lieve folks can hurt you.

SPUNK. I b'lieve they can hurt me if they get something in my stomach and cut me or shoot me. But burying things for me to step over and things like that, naw! You cooks for me so he can't put no spider in my dumpling. I keep my eye on him 'round the mill so he can't steal me with a knife or a gun. And I watch them logs he loads on the carriage so he can't trick none to throw me on that saw. So what is it to worry about?

LINA. Still and all things can be done, can't they? (makes a general appeal.)

WILLIE JOE. I know they can. I done seen things happen. Plenty things. I seen a hoodoo doctor up in Georgia put a man to barking like & dog.

SPUNK. Well, if these hoodoo doctors can do so much why don't they conjure these white folks and get hold of some money and some power? Why don't they hoodoo the bank? How come they don't put a spell on the jail house and keep colored folks out of it? These white folks is raw-hide to their backs and they 'round here throwing hoodoo at each other! Ain't nothing to 'em. Let me catch Old Bishop 'round my house and I'll let him hoodoo all he wants to while I run a railroad 'round he neck. He's abstificaly a humbug! But I just got married so I feel like treating. Everybody have something on me. Talk fast.

(There is a general clamor for various soft drinks, gum and cigarettes.)

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Come on, Oral, and help me tote it.

(He exits, right, with ORAL.)

LINA. Spunk would get hurt if I listened to him. But I done sent down to Lakeland to that doctor down there. He's supposed to be better than Dr. Buzzard. He say anything Old Bishop try to do to Spunk, he'll throw it back on him.

MRS. WATSON. And, honey, he can do it, too. I know him. He has worked for me. He's good. He works with rattle-snakes. And you know the spirit they represent lives under God's foot-rest. 'Tain't nothing more powerful than that. Did he give you anything to keep in the house.

LINA. Yes. Some special dressed mustard seed. I told him about something like a cat coming in our bedroom every night. He give me some mustard seed to sprinkle by the door. If anybody get out of their skins to come thru' our keyhole he'll salt their hides. They'll never get back in it no more. They'll die.

(She halts in fright. Enter BISHOP, left. Stares about him and approachces MRS. WATSON.)

MRS. WATSON. How d'do, Brother Bishop?

BISHOP. I ain't none of your brother. Your brother is out hunting coconuts. I'm going to have you up in church and see can't they handle you.

MRS. WATSON. What for?

BISHOP. You know what for. Letting murdering infidels marry in your parlor and then you holding a reception for 'em! The church ought to handle you. I'm going to have you up.

MRS. WATSON. You grassgut goat, you! I begged you to stop your son from

tackling Spunk with that razor. You said leave him alone. Now don't come blaming me.

(Enter SPUNK and ORAL, loaded down but running)

SPUNK. Hey, folks! My lumber done come! Going to build us a new house under the magnolia tree. Made arrangements to get it yesterday and now the boos done sent it. Y'all drink! Come on, Evalina! Less me and you walk this off!

(He drops the packages and crosses to LINA in high spirits. All but bumps into BISHOP. Looks grim as their eyes meet. And starts right with LINA.)

NUNKIE (clapping) Hey, Spunk, you and Lina do the short walk.

(Others clap. SPUNK squats down, takes LINA'S hand and she leads him off in a rhythmic waddle that makes the others laugh.)

MRS. WATSON. Bishop, Spunk ought to pay you good for working for him. Heh! Heh! You say you working against him, but look like you gives him the best of luck. Heh! Heh!

BISHOP. I ain't worked against him yet. I just been letting nature take its course but before long I mean to raise hell and put a chunk under it.

ORAL. That ain't what you said. You told us the very night that Spunk met Lina at the toe-party that you had done put travel-dust down for him and he couldn't stay here more'n three days. It's nearly a year now.

BISHOP. Oh, that's all right, it will get him to go. You just watch.

NUNKIE. Yeah, and you said you had done dressed that saw to kill him and that ain't happened, neither. He's making good money at it.

BISHOP. Oh 'tain't too late. Ten years ain't too long for a condar to wear a stiff bosom shirt.

(razzing noise)

Act III, Scene II

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MRS. WATSON. And you put out your brags that he was going to be hung 'bout that shooting and look what happened! Sixty days. And come home, got his old job back and done married Lina and now building a brand new house. You sure have put him on the ladder. (laughter) If you keep on working at him like you is we'll soon have a jig Governor of Florida. (laughter) You make out youse Old Man Jump-off. Make out you can peep through muddy water and see dry land.

ORAL. Thought you said Spunk was going to die on the chain gang? Thought you said you had done parted hin to Lina. You ain't no trouble! Just beating up your gums for nothin g. Done made a big mess then fell in it. (laughter) Hope it don't give you the protolapsis of the cutinary lining.

BISHOP (angrily awesome) That's right! Laugh fools and show your ignorance! I ain't done nothing yet 'cause I ain't tried nothing yet. Not nothing serious. And how come I didn't? 'Cause the right elements ain't come together. I works with cats, the most powerful thing in God's world. So the cat-bone told me to wait. It's bean hard, but I done waited. Now the cat-bone says next Friday night is my time. Then the 17 quarters of the spirit will meet in the upper air. I'll meet 'em! (they begin to be awed) The black cat-bone will take the throne in power! I'm going to show you that ugly laugh.

(He exits in trembling anger. The others watch him go in awe.)

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(CURTAIN)

Scene II

Conjure scene can not be fully put on paper. Must be done in direction.

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Conjure Scene

Times: one a.m. Friday

Place: HODGE BISHOP'S altar room

Persons: HODGE BISHOP and six others

Setting

It is a small room with rafters and joists showing. There is a big altar upstage right. A small one in the corner, upstage left. Entrance, rude door, downstage, left. Fastens with a bar. Altar set for a death ceremony. Ceremonial objects about the room.

Action

At the rise, the six men dressed in cat robes stand around the pea-vine emblem on the floor. They stand silent and tense. Hands to the sides. HODGE is before the altar lighting the "earth" candle and the incense. He takes six blue candles from the altar and gives one to each of the men. They hold the candles in the left hand. HODGE returns to the altar and takes up a doll on it that is bound hand and foot and pieces it in the power spot. Takes a large black candle and lights it from the earth candle and begins to dance towards the first man. They join right hands and dance a step around each other. HODGE lights the man's

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candle from his and dances on to the next one and so on until all are burning. Then he dances back to the altar via the pea-vine and assaults the doll and cries out.

HODGE. Death! Follow this man! Follow this Spunk. Take his body and his footsteps off the earth.

(The men cry out like great angry cats. HODGE pours whiskey out before Death.)

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I'm paying you to follow that man!

(They all cry out again.)

(HODGE deposits a nickel and cries again and the others answer. He dances down the pea-vine with the others growling and snarling and dances back to the altar, more excited this time.)

The great cat! Born of the cat! I ask you to follow this man.

(Same business as before. He dances down the pea-vine once again. This time the tempo is increased. When he returns to the altar he beats and stabs the doll violently with the cat-men crying and snarling.)

He is not to the north for we have been there

He is not to the south for we have searched there

He is not to the east for we have looked well.

So we hurry to the west for we shall find him.

(There is a wild burst of gloating, crying, dancing.)

Bring in the winds!

(They make the gesture of sweeping the four winds in to the altar. They drop the cat robes and stand nude and shining black. They dance fiercely. HODGE takes the black cat-bone from the altar and places it in his mouth. The dance continues. They all rub him violently for a moment with their hands until he trembles violently, then leap away as in terror as far as possible. HODGE begins to writhe and his black skin begins to split at the top of his head.)

SIX MEN. Slip 'em and slip 'em again!

(The skin peels on down to the neck.)

HODGE. Cat men! Guard my skin! Cat men! Guard my skin from evil.

SIX MEN. It shall be protected from pepper and salt!

(The black skin peels on down slowly and HODGE stands dripping blood as he steps out of his skin and picks it up and stretches it before the altar. That done, he creeps down-stage, center, and glares all about him.)

HODGE (in a thundering voice) Where is my saddle cat?

(There is a great cat-call and the shadow of a huge bristling

Act III, Scene III

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cat is seen on the back wall. HODGE makes to mount it. There is a great wail of cats. Darkness.)

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(CURTAIN)

ACT III

Scene 3

Setting

Street scene. Late afternoon.

Many homey flowers around both houses. A pile of new lumber beneath the magnolia tree. LINA sits at her window humming and braiding her hair. She dresses it attractively and looks at herself well in the mirror. RUBY in a clean wash dress enters and sits on her steps but turns her back to LINA pointedly. LINA laughs and humming comes outside to cut a red hibiscus bloom which she fixes in her hair and walks to the gate and leans over. Enter MRS. WATSON, right, and stops at LINA'S gate.

LINA. How do you do, Mrs. Watson? You looking fine.

MRS. WATSON. Oh, so-so. Waiting for that husband, eh?

LINA. Oh, I just come out this minute. You know I got to have a flower to wear. Where you headed for?

MRS. WATSON. Right here. I want some flowers for my sitting room. I'm expecting company from way off. Presiding Elder.

LINA (opens gate) Come in. Get all you want of what you see. (She enters and begins to pick flowers leisurely) I'd pick 'em for you but I'm

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too busy looking up the road for my husband. (laughs) That first glimpse is always so nice. Sort of like day-break. You know it's coming but it gives you a glad surprise every time. It's funny, ain't it?

MRS. WATSON. Oh, I reckon so. I done got past all that. Sometimes my husband come home and get in the bed with me and I don't know it 'til I wake up next morning.

LINA. You know, I'm worried 'bout Spunk. He makes good money and the boss is good to him, but I wish he'd quit that job. Old Bishop is working against him and he ain't never going to stop 'til Spunk is dead. I woke up screaming last night. Look like a great big tiger cat was springing on us in the bed.

MRS. WATSON. Do, Jesus! Umph! Umph! Umph!

LINA. Yes, honey, there was the howling and growling of cats 'round this house last night from midnight 'til nearly daybreak when that big cat something jumped at us in the bed. But somehow it halted right in the air over us and vanished. (tearfully) I want to leave here! That's why I haven't let Spunk start on the new house. I want us to go.

MRS. WATSON. Why don't you tell him, honey?

LINA. I done told him but he won't listen. He says he'll be a well-off man in five years if he keep on like he's going. But I'm afraid he won't be alive by then. He ain't got it to study about. It's me.

(They sit on the front steps)

And today I can't sit nowhere in peace. Not after that dream I had. It still seem too plain for a dream.

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MRS. WATSON. Oh, they say Friday night, dark of the moon, is the time for dreams and visions. Some say that whatever you see then is true. I don't know. (More cheerfully) What you got good for supper?

LINA. Spare-ribs and hopping-John. It's seasoned down, too. Don't you want some of it?

MRS. WATSON (Laughs) Lord, naw! I got the same thing. My husband buys five pounds of black-eye peas every Saturday. Only I got bacon instead of spare-ribs, (look of listening.)

LINA (half rising in alarm) Sounds like I hear some singing at a distance. (she listens intensely.) Songs and crying mixed. (Waits listening. RUBY rises and moves about restlessly like an animal sensing danger.)

MRS. WATSON (wide-eyed in apprehension) Reckon I better get along home. Go inside, Lina, and set down.

(She coaxes LINA to her gate tenderly. Then moves to left exit.)

I better go see.

(exits)

(RUBY moves to left exit and back to her own door. Nervous, jerky movements. LINA stands, violently a-tremble, near her gate. So far not a sound has been heard. Then the sound of chanting, mournful and high comes faintly to them. They answer, RUBY in a high, kiating wail, LINA a throaty, sustained moan.)

RUBY. Oh, Lord, to never know! To never know!

(The wailing comes nearer. A voice can be heard "lining out" HARK FROM THE TOMB A DOLEFUL SOUND MINE EARS ATTEND A CRY. This is sung by the chorus, mostly

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male. Muted, doleful. LINA staggers to her step and sits down heavily and begins moaning to herself.)

EVALINA (raises her head bravely) I ain't to cry. That wouldn't be right. It would look like I was sorry 'bout something when I

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ain't. (strangles a sob.) He done filled every little corner in my heart. Ain't nothing been left out. He done showed his love in every way a man could do. (moans sadly, triumphantly) I done had love from on high. (rises) I got to pick some flowers for him to rest under because he was that kind of a man - big, and sweet-smelling and clean, like magnolias.

(She enters gate and pulls down a limb and begins to break blooms hurriedly. RUBY sees her and begins to pick roses frantically. Both keep looking off-stage, left. The wierd chant breaks out again right at hand. The group are about to enter, left. LINA comes out of the gate with a large bunch of flowers and stands trying to be brave.)

These flowers in my hand don't keep the water out my eyes, though. (sings)

Stand by me, Lord, stand by me

Stand by me, Lord, stand by me

Standing in the world, Lord, the world don't like me

Stand by me, Lord., stand by me.

(The cortege enters. Six men bear a crumpled body on an improvised stretcher. A wide, new board with three short lengths of timber beneath it as handles. RUBY stops picking roses and starts down-stage. EVALINA walks resolutely to meet the group and wipes her

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eyes and looks lovingly down. Then starts violently, puzzled for a moment. Then joyfully drops the flowers from her hand. A flower or two rolls off on to the ground.)

EVALINA. T'in't Spunk! It's old man Bishop!

WILLIE JOE. Yeah, death took the old man kind of sudden-like.

(They move on. EVALINA nearly bursts with joy. RUBY also expands. The sound of a guitar is heard off left. Joyful. LINA'S feet fly that was as SPUNK comes walking fast and joyfully.)

SPUNK. Hello, Sugar! How's papa's lil ground angel!

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(LINA does not answer. Catches hold of him and searches his face. Picks up a fallen flower and signals him to bow his head. He does so and she thrusts it in his hatband.)

SPUNK. What's the matter, honey? Look like you 'bout to cry. You really ought to be laughing. Old Hodge Bishop was so busy trying to get me onto that saw that he let a log fall on him. And when they moved it, there was the old conjure man pressed just as pretty as a flower. (they both laugh)

LINA. (sniffing and tearing off into house) Come on in. I smell my supper burning! (she dashes inside)

RUBY (sidling up) I'm so glad you ain't hurt, Spunk, I had to go pick some flowers. Bet mama going to kill me 'bout her flowers. (smells roses and gets ready to offer them) Yes indeed, I'm real gald you ain't hurt.

SPUNK (laughs) Me get hurt! Who going to hurt me? So long, Ruby

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(He dashes in after LINA.)

(The guitar begins to sound gaily inside and RUBY tips to the window and peers in. They begin to sing EVALINA. After the first verse RUBY sings.)

RUBY. Me with flowers in my hand and love and me apart
Flowers withered like the house stretching on to break of heart
Roses scorned and drooping low to die
Empty hours weeping, creeping as they pass me by.

(SPUNK and EVALINA sing)

RUBY. I squat beside the way of life where highways meet and part

With wilted flowers in my hand and trouble in my heart

The flowers ungiven in my hands to die

And life unmingled on my heart to lie

(She walks slowly towards her step. The flowers dropping one by one from her hand. She hums sadly an obligato over SPUNK and EVALINA'S song.) (CURTAIN)